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SUBJECT: ACEH -- STEPS TO PROMOTE SMOOTH ELECTIONS

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Classified By: Ambassador Cameron R. Hume, reasons 1.4(b+d).

11. (U) This message was coordinated with Consulate Medan.

12. (C) SUMMARY: Upcoming legislative elections have the potential to consolidate democracy in Aceh or to polarize communities. Recent incidents of politically-linked violence and breakdowns in law and order have created tensions not felt since the signing of the 2005 peace accord. While a breakdown of the situation is unlikely, the stakes remain high. The USG can help ensure that the elections are a forum for peaceful resolution of differences. To that end, Mission is taking the steps outlined in paragraph 11. END SUMMARY.

GROWING CONCERNs RE ACEH

13. (C) A recent surge of political shootings and grenade attacks (Ref A) has heightened concerns in Aceh ahead of the April 9 national legislative elections. While the violence is putting citizens on edge, more disturbing is the inability of the police to solve the crimes or offer any public explanation. This has sharpened the rumor mill as to who is behind the violence.

14. (C) Rumors are rife. The unsubstantiated rumors include reports that the Indonesian Army (TNI) and National Intelligence Agency (BIN) are behind the attacks in an effort to discredit the Partai Aceh (PA) (which is composed of ex-Aceh Freedom Movement (GAM) members). In the Ambassador's recent meeting with Aceh Governor Irwandi Yusuf, the Governor asserted that the TNI was behind the recent threats and violence. Some GOI officials have also told Medan ConGen that TNI is to blame. However, another senior ministry official as well as the Aceh provincial TNI commander told the DAO that the TNI definitely is not involved in any way. Some believe that Partai Aceh is behind the violence--to frame the TNI, intimidate the opposition or simply to retaliate against business rivals.

RIGHT WING PARANOIA

15. (C) Right wing elements of the GOI are openly paranoid about PA taking control of the provincial Parliament in the elections. Sources who suspect TNI, BIN, etc., told ConGen that elements of these bodies "will do anything" to stop PA, from intimidation to fomenting riots. Clearly, right wing nationalists are keyed up over the "Kosovo Scenario" for Aceh, a belief that a PA-controlled Parliament will call for a referendum generating international support for Aceh independence. They have never trusted the Acehnese or Irwandi and see national unity as paramount. Scenario proponents distrust former Finnish President Marti Ahtisaari who negotiated the Aceh peace agreements, due to his role in Kosovo. They furthermore would blame President Yudhoyono for "losing Aceh" should PA win, because he championed the Peace Agreement.

GAM PROVOCATIONS

¶16. (C) PA/GAM have aggravated this paranoia. GAM, for example, has refused to follow through on its commitment to disband GAM and the GAM-led Commission for Transition in Aceh (KPA). Furthermore, Partai Aceh has not actively distanced itself from calls by some of its members and legislative candidates for a referendum nor repudiated campaign materials indicating that voting for PA is a step toward independence. More than any other party, PA also has threatened and intimidated supporters of other local parties.

DECADES OF CONFLICT BREED PROBLEMS

¶17. (C) Civil society observers in Aceh say that the GAM/nationalist conflict is not the real danger which could undermine the elections and Aceh peace. In fact, they say GAM has little fight left in it and is more interested in getting a larger share of the wealth. Some say the most likely-and best outcome-would be smaller parties getting most of the vote. More important is an increasing breakdown of law and order, lack of rule of law, and economic inequality.

¶18. (C) Decades of conflict in Aceh have traumatized local society. In some parts of Aceh, 40 percent of the people say they have directly suffered from conflict violence, leading to a high level of communal distrust and cynicism. In former hot-spots such as districts of Gayo Lues, Bireuen, Aceh Tenggara, etc., half the people say basic necessities are hard to access and basic services are woefully lacking; even clean water is unavailable. A general discontent that government wealth is not trickling down to the people has eroded credibility in the system.

¶19. (C) In addition, large numbers of young ex-combatants are unemployed and lack the education and skills needed to find jobs. Ex-GAM members also feel entitled to the spoils of peace after years of fighting in the hills. This situation has led to a rash of robberies and other crimes and a break down of law and order which instill fear throughout society.

¶110. (C) Finally, there seem to be no regulations governing election campaigning. The TNI has torn down campaign banners, citing its own rules, without the involvement of election officials. Civil society leaders and politicians alike are afraid to speak out on political issues, a chill not felt since 2004. Public awareness of the various parties' campaign platforms is low. There is concern that the elections could result in victories by inexperienced, poorly educated and corrupt candidates who will further disappoint the people.

KEY STEPS

¶111. (C) The situation is worrisome but not dire. To help improve the chance of success of the election process, Mission is taking the following steps:

--We are sending clear signals to key officials in Jakarta that the situation in Aceh is of concern and that the GOI needs to take strong corrective steps. We have started at the working level and will move to the top, including with senior TNI and police officers. We also will meet with Security and Political Affairs Department officials who oversee security policy towards Aceh as well as with Vice President Kalla who was key to the peace process. We recommend that the Secretary mention Aceh in her meeting with the President during her Feb. 18-19 visit. The Ambassador also plans to meet with Ahtisaari when he next visits Indonesia.

--The Ambassador will issue a statement to the media or place an op-ed piece laying out clear USG support for Indonesia's territorial integrity, while also expressing concern over the importance of peaceful election in Aceh. Secretary Clinton should also include a reference to territorial integrity in her public remarks here.

--We are collaborating with other governments on peaceful elections, including coordinated election observation teams. For example, The Carter Center is considering a presence in Aceh through the elections. Governor Irwandi told the Ambassador he would like election observers present. In addition, USAID has several ongoing election and reconciliation projects in Aceh which will run through the elections, and more such projects are being considered.

THE WORK IS NOT OVER

¶12. (C) Aceh has been hailed worldwide as an example of a successful peace process, but the work is not over. A free and fair election which garners public support will help consolidate gains and set the scene for resolution of outstanding issues. Election day and the lead-up period are likely to include some violence, but if the whole process is seen as unfair, the situation could percolate and boil over in the coming months. The proactive steps outlined above are measures we can take to protect progress in Aceh.

HUME